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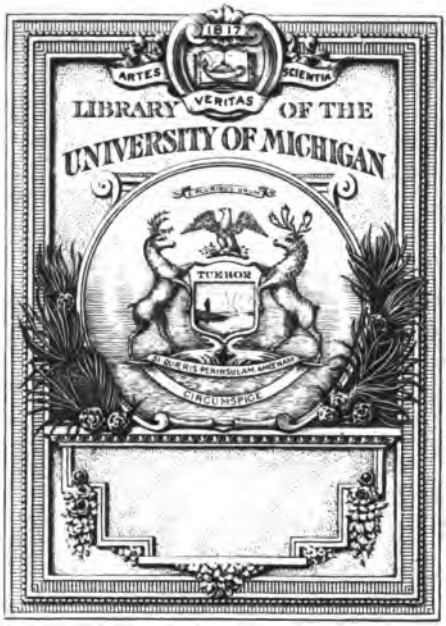
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TRISTRAM & ISOULT

BY

MARTHA W. AUSTIN

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1905

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TO
THE MEMORY
OF
MY FATHER

155984

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

KING ARTHUR OF BRITAIN
KING MARK OF CORNWALL
SIR LAUNCELOT DU LAC
SIR TRISTRAM OF LYONESSE
SIR ANDRED
QUEEN GUINEVERE
QUEEN ISOULT
ISOULT BLANCHE MAINS OF BRITTANY
BRANGWANE, BLANCHELYS, LINETTE, COLOMBE—

Queen Isoult's damsels, and other women in waiting to the two Queens.

Knights, pages, etc.

FOREWORD

A YEAR ago when this dramatic poem was already completed, though wanting some retouching in metrical detail, I came upon the notice of a "Tristan and Isolde" by Louis Anspacher, a blank verse drama intended for stage production, about to be published by Brentano. For six months I had not the courage to order the book in question and learn if my work were superseded and superfluous. When at length I did read Mr. Anspacher's drama I found there was still a place for my own version, as the two differed almost as much as it was possible for any two treatments of the same theme to differ.

Mr. Anspacher's story is based, as the form of the names would indicate, upon the German legend, and follows somewhat the lines of Wagner's libretto. The great divergence between the German and the English variants lies with the character of *Mark*. In the one he is a mild, noble and benign old man; in the other he is a base, crafty, false-hearted and scheming coward. The conception of King Mark's character is the moral necessity that determines whether the passion of the lovers shall be guilty and secret or fearless and avowed. I have builded on Mallory, who tells how, wearied in the struggle against Mark's unremitting treachery, Sir Tristram after the vile betrayal and battle behind the chapel on the rocks, in which he came so near to losing his life, bore Queen Isoult into Launcelot's country and there lived with her in the castle of Joyous Garde.

Thus I have found in the Mallorean text my instance of Queen Isoult sending Tristram to the tourney at the great feast of Pentecost. "Sir, said Isoult, and it please you I will not be there, for through me ye be marked of many good knights, and that causeth you to have much more labour for my sake than needeth you. Then will I not be there, said Sir Tristram, but if ye be there. Not so, said Belle Isoult, for then shall I be spoken of shame among all queens and ladies of estate, for ye that are called one of the noblest knights of the world, and ye a knight of the Round Table, how may ye be missed at that feast? What shall be said among all knights? See how Sir Tristram hunteth, and hawketh and cowereth within a castle with his lady, and forsaketh your worship. Alas, shall some say, it is pity that ever he was made knight or that ever he should have the love of a lady. Also what shall queens and ladies say of me? It is pity that I have my life that I will hold so noble a knight as ye are from his worship."

There also it is written that he returned again to his own country to become its defender in its need; when Fate, who had let these two lives a brief space out of her hand, gathered their threads once more to the waiting shears.

For the rest I have used what freedom I chose, in that privilege of each to draw the thing as he sees it; for the story is legend and has not the constraining fixity of historical fact. MARTHA W. AUSTIN.

New Orleans, March 15th.

TRISTRAM AND ISOULT

PART I

Scene I. (*A room in Arthur's palace at Camelot. On a latticed balcony at back, some ladies of the court gaily dressed. Enter from balcony Queen Guinevere and the Queen La Belle Isoult.*)

Guinevere

Ma Belle Isoult, here have you watched, unseen,
The prowess of your knight—the brittle spears
Went down before him as when Winter breathes
Upon the mailèd boughs.

Isoult

To see his joy
When I have told him that I saw him joust!
He never jousts so well, he says, as when
Beneath my eyes, and loath was he to come
Without me, till I urged—"The world will say
Thou art to deeds grown dull, and dead to fame,
Thy days all passed in harping, or the hunt,
Or worse yet, by thy lady's side. Go—but
I will not go with thee, for fear that thou
Be known, and all the knights bear down at once,
Keen for that glory, Tristram overborne."
No sooner was he gone than we took horse,
Brangwane, Sir Dinadin, and I; and all
The way from Joyous Garde to Camelot
We followed scarce a mile behind his heels!

(*Cries without on balcony, enter Brangwane.*)

Brangwane

The green knight rides away and none knows whither!
The people shout for him.

Isoult

Ah, well I know
He rides to Joyous Garde to seek Isoult.
What ill may happen, if he miss me thence!
Go, Brangwane, take this ring to Launcelot,
Tell him that stranger knight who hath this day
Been victor here, is Tristram, who returns
To Joyous Garde. Bid him acquaint my lord
I am with Guinevere.

(*Exit Brangwane.*)

Guinevere

Ah, my Isoult,
How have I envied thee thy Joyous Garde,
Where thou hast fled from Mark and all his court,
And lived with Tristram these two happy years.
For there thou hadst no need to hold a hand
Curved round the flame to hide it from men's eyes.
But ours close-covered in the dark must burn.
And still, although the light men cannot see,
It seems they feel the warmth. There have been hints—
Always some mockery on Gawaine's lips.
Mordred suspects. When Launcelot is here,
I feel them watching us. I fear, Isoult.
Suspicion grows; at times I turn, arrest
The glance swift-travelling behind my back,

To see it on a sudden sink to still
Submission on the floor. My ears are strained
To whispers—all eyes are watchmen, all tongues
Are witnesses. We princes lift tall heads,
The winds of rumor blowing over us
Scatter the seeds of action through the land.
And I, rank weed, oh, what an evil crop
Through all my lord's wide acres shall I sow!
The woman in me was not born a queen,
Subject to duty from her very birth!
They should have led me straight from tutory
Unto the throne, letting mine eyes not once
Stray to the simple happy world without.
I am raised up too high, and in my search
For Nature's common level, fall too low.
Arthur I scarce do think on as a man,
But moulded of the essence of a King.
I look at him and know his diadem
Circles no thought outside its kingly round.
My brow should match his; in its golden orb
Strait as the forehead of some saint that shines
Out of the altar galaxy full-sunned,
Yet with a look of mundane matters, made
Majestical. Alas, this crown of mine
Sheddeth its splendor to light up my shame—
A baleful beacon guiding every eye
To settle on me and to eat me through—
Through all the shams and secrets, to the soul!
Oh, take away the ermine, tissues, pearls,
And purples—give me back my one bare shift,
My maid's shift of white chastity!

Isoult

Not so
Feel I. I put my love on like a crown,
To wear it in men's sight. 'Tis Tristram makes

Me queen—not Mark.

Guinevere

Yet hadst thou wedded been
To one like Arthur—

Isoult

Aye, the cause lies there.
And hadst thou wedded been to one like Mark!
Yet not alone in this our fates diverge—
It was not sin, when I loved Tristram first.
Under a false name's shield he came to us,
Wounded and weak, to ask my mother's skill.
I did not know him for my uncle's slayer,—
I must have held him guiltless, had I known—
Since he for Cornwall fought, serving his king,
His country, even as Marhaus fought for Ireland.
I dreamed not then what stream of kinsman's blood
Between us flowed. While strength came slow to him,
We were together. In long eventides,
As restless little stars will drop away,
To leave the heavens lonely to the moon,
The thousand little cares of day slipped out
Of sight, and left large space for love. Then he
Would take his harp and sing me Cornish lays,
Or tell me stories of King Arthur's court,
And we were happy, till one dreadful day
My mother, seeking, found his broken sword,
And struck by the strange work and diapered
Design, fitted into the jagged blade
The piece that had from Marhaus' wound been taken,
And which in hope of vengeance still she kept.
Sudden as if the sword itself had turned,

Conscious its point upon her, passed the truth
Into her breast. She sped unto my father
Urgent of her revenge. "And knowest thou,
King Anguish, whom thou harbourest? This Tristram
Is Cornish robber of Sir Marhaus' life.
He cometh here for leech-craft as the bitten
Desireth the dog's hair upon the bite.
Or as we bind the adder on the part
Its fang envenomed." This Brangwane o'erheard
And I so warned, sent Tristram safely thence.
Thus fell the end. Never until that hour
Were we aware of love. And fearfully
In agony our passion came to birth,
In throes of parting. But though Joy, its mother,
Died in the moment, looking on its face,
Love lived.

Guinevere

Whither fled Tristram then?

Isoult

To Cornwall.

Guinevere

Was love begun so long ago?

Isoult

Aye, even
So long ago. Yet ere he came again
Three years had passed, and then he came to take
His uncle Mark a bride. I—I must go,
Must close the breach between estrangèd kings,

And range me with the marble women who
Forever prop the roofs of palaces
With their numbed arms. I went—and all the rest
Is known to thee. See, Guinevere, this ring—
On that wild night of parting Tristram placed
It there. Dost wonder that my marriage band
Looked but a pale usurper by its side?

Guinevere

I wonder not. Thou hast not wronged the highest,
Nor daily undermined his builded hope,
Nor known thyself the worm that eats the heart
Of a whole realm, and makes it at the core
One rottenness! Would I were dead! I weary
Of love's unrest: I think of convent halls,
Those long, cool corridors that lead the way
To the low door of Death. Love has no peace.
I dread that Launcelot of straining up
May tire, to reach the joys forever out
Of reach, and take some nestling happiness,
That is not noble but is near.

Isoult

I, too,
Have had that fear, but I have lost it, now.

Guinevere

When hadst thou it? When Tristram to Isoult
Blanche Mains of Brittany, was wed?

Isoult

Aye, then,
The bitterness of then! I hated him.

And Oh, to hate what thou hast loved! To touch
Some flower-thought thou hast been wont to wear
Upon thy breast, and feel instead the bee!
To wander from the garden of old hours
Shut out, and see a face, a woman's face,
Look on thee from the places that were thine!
To waken in the night and know his kiss,
Now dry upon thy lips is fresh on hers!
But let me not renew that ancient pang.
All that is past—long past. And he is now
The surelier—surelier—mine—mine—mine!

Guinevere

King Howell made that marriage. But, Isoult,
There is another thief, worse than sweet eyes
For in the end he steals the sweet eyes too,
And that is Time—dull Time—I dread that love
Shall age,—that its gray ghost with gibbering lips,
Too pale for kisses, shall walk in the room
Of this bright vision with the sun-gold hair.
Then will regret be deeper than remorse
Is with me now. For if I fear to keep
This love of Launcelot's, I fear to lose
It more. The faultless goodness of the King
Sometimes the chief of my reproach, again
Is my guilt's plea. Though great in our regard,
Goodness fills not the place of love. Had I
But met my Arthur ere he was the king,
All had been changed, perchance. Could he have been
My lover for a little while, not first
And last the full-blown husband! Would we wish
The wide, unfolded green and drowsy peace
Of a midsummer's day, unless there came,
Fore-running sharpness of keen April's joy.
And what would be the dawn, were there no flush,

No faint, cold fears, and tremblings of the earth,
No wet of tears upon her virgin face?
(*Enter Tristram.*)

Tristram

Pardon, this is the rash, emboldened man
Who stumbles on the counsel of two Queens,—
But Launcelot rode after me in haste
With word I must come back— She waited here
Whose eyes would know me when I should be hid
From God on High.

Guinevere

And thou wouldst ride away
And not divulge thee even to Launcelot's self?
Oh Truant! Is it then Sir Tristram's use
To fight and flee? Hast thou yet seen the King?

Tristram

Madam, not yet, but I will go to him.
He hath had news that gravely doth concern
Myself, and Launcelot saith he had a mind
To send to Joyous Garde and summon me.

Guinevere

I will go say thou'lt shortly come to him.
Construe meanwhile my welcome not amiss,
If I should leave thee with this lady here
Awhile. Methinks you will not find yourselves
At loss for speech.
(*Exit Guinevere.*)

Isoult

Tristram!

Trastram

(*Catching her in his arms*). Isoult! Isoult!
To think that thou wast here and saw it all!
This was thy plan!

Isoult

We followed on thy trail,
Brangwane and I. Dinadan rode with us.
I must be here to take thee in my arms,
The glow still on thee, ere the glory fade,
Or thou cool from the anvil of the strife
Where thou wast hammered hot with many blows,
While I, the woman, catch reflected fire
As doth some little cloud that flieth far
Upon the outer edges of the storm.
Would it were so! I but a cloud to bear
High in the heavens and in all men's sight
Thy glory burning on my brow, my feet,
My breast!

Tristram

The wish is needless, thou shalt bear
It on thy bosom as thou art. Thus! Thus!
(*He throws the ruby carcanet over her neck*).

Isoult

The carcanet! The carcanet! The prize,
The tourney's prize! And won by thee!

Tristram

And won
For thee!

Isoult

I shall not envy Guinevere
Her diamonds now.

Tristram

Envy! Thou enviest
Her jewels?

Isoult

Nay, but every diamond there
Stands for a joust and flashes forth the fame
Of Launcelot.

Tristram

Her diamonds suit well
That April Queen. Her variable mood
Doth come and go in their illumined depths.
Their purity troubled with changeful fire,
Symbols the shaken soul of Guinevere.
But these are thine, these flaming, vermeil drops—

Isoult

Heart-shaped, heart-colored,—'tis the rosary
Of loving hearts, whereon we'll tell the names
Of those who for love's sake have greatly lived
And died. This Hero's heart, and this the heart
Of that Egyptian Queen—

Tristram

This of Isoult—

Isoult

And this of Guinevere. You know her not
How she loves Launcelot.

Tristram

Half heartedly—
Queen first and lover last. April is she,
A pettish April—thou art Autumn ripe,
The glooming Autumn of old forests dark—
Autumn that loves on in the grasp of death,
And gives herself unto the asking winds.
Something of sadness and of fear is wrought
In with thy spell. I knew thee fatal when
I saw thee first. Thy deep eyes were the gates
To mystery opening back; thy whiteness shone
And glimmered as it belonged to dim sea-depths;
And shadow undispelled dwelt on thy hair.
Thy spirit stirred me like a wind that passed—
Thy beauty tossed me with a wild unrest.
Thou art a doom half dread,—yet, Oh, my Queen,
A thousand lilies pale and opening buds
Of maids, would I forego for one full breath
Of thee, thou passion-flower of Love!

Isoult

Tell me,
Is it not worth all pain that we have known?

Tristram

And all that is to come.

Isoult

What meanest thou?
What pain? What is to come? Ah, thou wilt go
Upon this quest, this new quest of the Grail?

Tristram

That is for Galahad and the rest, but I
Have found my Grail; the cup from Brangwane's breast
We took upon the ship, after the storm
That night—I drank of it, and in mine ears
A strain of music, and through all my blood
The splendor streamed.

Isoult

Oh, but not then, not then,
For the first time! You loved me long before.

Tristram

I loved thee 'neath the king thy father's roof,
That day, thou didst with healing fingers search
My wound. My life was dying in dull smoke
And fever-fume of dreams, when in the dimness
Thy face first bent on me, breathed on the spark,
And it sprang up and flowered in live flame.

Isoult

Oh, and that night of Mark's great hunt when thou

Hadst stolen back. The hoary-forest sprang
Above our heads; its arches hollowed out
Of darkness;—faint we heard the sobbing horns
As moonlight weave their cold thin silver through
The shades—the hunt of life passed by—far, like
A dream—the baying pack of tongues—the stroke
Of swift-struck death—what were they then to us?
Spectral the clamorous chase of all the world
Unreal life—unreal death—to us
Who had found love!

Tristram

To us who have found love!

Isoult

Put me not off, not even with words like these,
What fresh pain waits for us?

Tristram

If we must part?

Isoult

Must part? Why, what can part us now?

Tristram

Cornwall
Sends word. Sessions invades the realm, whom
Mark
Can ill afford to match, and Arthur fears—

Isoult

Arthur! 'Tis Arthur, then, sets thee this task!

Tristram

It is my native land; the charge devolves
On me alone.

Isoult

Then I foresee the end—
The end of all—all happiness, all peace.
No thought for me! Arthur has but to speak
Some bloodless sermon; for the cold king lets
A many-rooted duty overrun
His soul, as ivy o'erruns marble—
(*Re-enter Guinevere followed by Arthur and Launcelot.*)

Guinevere

Tristram,
The king, eager to praise thy lady's act,
No longer would delay.

King Arthur.

Madam, I hear
How love hath shielded him. Indeed 'twere best
He were not known,—our knights grow envious;
It is too much—so great a fortune both
In love and war. The chiefest fortune this,
That when of courage confident that needs
No proof, he would have stayed from these last jousts,
Isoult, for honor jealous, sent him hither.
Was not this well done, Launcelot?

Launcelot

My liege,
Most nobly done.

King Arthur

The love that unto duty—

Isoult

To what new duty must love yield? I see
Behind thy words' cautious, contrivèd screen,
Some lurking motive stand.

King Arthur

Hath Tristram told
Thee then?

Isoult

Of what?

Arthur

Of peril imminent
To Cornwall and King Mark.

Isoult

'Tis like that I
Should care for peril to King Mark, himself
The very worst of perils unto me.

Arthur

To Cornwall then.

Isoult

And Cornwall a huge trap
Ready to spring on me; it's only good,
That the green Irish sea washes its shores.

Arthur

'Tis Tristram's land; to him all Cornwall looks.
His to redeem this canker of his race,
From the same blood—poison and antidote.

Launcelot

His Uncle Mark already asks his aid,
The fox begins to need the lion's paw.

Isoult

And art thou too against me, Launcelot?

Launcelot

Never, my Queen—

Arthur

Who is against La Belle
Isoult, unless it be herself? The self,
For honor eager to a tourney's gain,
Would have him now a recreant to his king?
And to his country false? I know that Mark
Hath plotted, prisoned, and betrayed—I know
His guile—yet in these tangled lives we lead
It sometimes happens public faith goes hand
In hand with private feud. So at this hour.

Tristram

Listen, Isoult—

Isoult

I will not hear thee plead
With them, opposing me!

Arthur

Whilst he is gone,
At Camelot remain with Guinevere.

Guinevere

Yes, stay with me.

Isoult

And he with Mark? No, no—
I must be there to watch. Always the going,—
Forever do I flutter on as doth
A bird in fear of him that followeth.
Oh, to drop down upon some spot of shelter
And fold the wings. Sir Launcelot—

Launcelot

Madam?

Isoult

For Joyous Garde I give thee many thanks;
I have been happy there.

Launcelot

And will return
To happiness again.

Isoult

To Joyous Garde
No more. Not joy shall guard me after this,
But doubt and dread shall keep unwearied ward
The joy no more was mine than was the castle,
I was the guest of Joy, and here I take
My leave. Anguish of Ireland is my father,
Tristram my love—I that am born of Anguish,
And wedded unto Sorrow, may not dwell
With Joy. Launcelot, if passing the great hall
Some night when the full moon doth mist her light
Down through the mullion to the floor, and makes
All dim as dreams; if thou, I say, shouldst see
Two figures, gray and carven as of stone,
He leaning on a harp, she on his breast,
And at their feet a hound that couches stark
And still—the moonlight weaves this vision; wipe
It from thine eyes: and if a strain should haunt
Thee like a harp—the wind alone thou hearest;
For when I die my spirit shall set up
Its ghostly monument forever, there,
At Joyous Garde—at Joyous Garde! Farewell.
(*Exit Isoult.*)

PART II

Scene I. (*A tower of King Mark's castle of Tintagil. A wide view of river, valley, and distant sea. Queen Isoult sitting at tambour frame, her women at work around her—all except Blanchelys, who leans over the low parapet.*)

Blanchelys

Ah, see the circling swallows, how they play—
Swim round and round the tower in the air,
Until my head swims, too, merely to watch.

Linette

That is because thou art so feather-brained.

Blanchelys

What color! Ah, what color! purple backs
Like to the sea, breasts tawny as sea-sands.
How their forked tails like scissors shear the air!
They chase the evening gnats—Oh Swallow, Swallow,
I'd live forever in the sea and sky
If I were thou, and never drop to earth.

Isoult

Sea-Swallow was the name of that good ship
On which we sailed from Ireland hither.

Linette

When
Sir Tristram brought you home? Tell us the story,

The story of the voyage and the storm.

Isoult

No, no, my heart is heavy, 'tis the hour
That I was wont to wait, at Joyous Garde,
His weary coming home from the long hunt.
At sunset would I mount the castle wall,
And set the bugle to my lips, and hear
Its voice forlornly wander, silver-sad,
Like a blown question seeking in the wood
'Till far away, from out the golden west
Came answer—Tristram's horn.

Blanchelys

Oh, those old days
At Joyous Garde—Would now that we were there!

Isoult

Name them no more, Blanchelys, their memory
Strikes me too deep.

Brangwane

'Tis time Sir Tristram came.
We know the battle hath been fought and won,
And Sessions sent to mark submission here,
And to King Mark swear oath of fealty.

Colombe

He little thought when Cornwall he invaded,
Tristram of Lyonesse would take the field.
(*Blanchelys who has meanwhile gone out, returns.*)

Blanchelys

Madam, the King comes hither; he would speak
With you.

Isoult

Tell him that he may come, Blanchelys.
(*She signs to her women to withdraw. Enter King Mark*).

Mark

My feet a little stumbled at this stair
So seldom worn with them. You find the air
Here pure—the prospect broad? Does any come
Speeding across the plain, he is from these
High towers visible, and thou canst watch
The winking speck grow to the mailèd man.
(*Isoult makes no answer; the king with a bitter smile*).
For such rewarding sight, even now no doubt
We wait. Be comforted, thou hast not long,
Tristram returns to-day.

Isoult

Aye, so I know.

Mark (*bitterly*)

I know thou knowest. Did I lack the news,
For its procurance I should send to thee.
'Twas usher to thy presence, that was all,
To smile me into favor with its use.
No phrase so fair that it may stand my friend,
For still my tongue must make its music rough.

Who hath more cause for gladness than ourself,
Is not our nephew come victorious home,
And from our quarrel?

Isoult

True, he hath once more
Redeemed thy realm. Three times for Cornwall hath
He fought—with Marhaus first, and out of that
Grew all our story—next—

Mark (*interrupting*)

He is the sword
I draw against my foes. I need his edge,
Yet grudge its dazzle in men's eyes. 'Tis well
To have him where my hand can reach him down,
But not hooked to my side and clanging round
My step.

Isoult

You love not ringing souls that make
Clear, warlike music; but some dagger's stealth
That slips in silence from his sheath, and back,
To muffle murder in a velvet cloak.
If Tristram's presence irk thee, then unloose
The silver cord that holds him to thy side.

Mark

The silver chord unloose—that were thyself—
Not so the Psalmist meant to use the words.
How if I take his meaning, and unloose
The twisted strands of being—wouldst thou part
With life?

Isoult

It were a way to part with thee.

Mark

Nay, I must follow soon, or else thy hell
Were not complete.

Isoult

We shall not meet in Hell.
Where the lean flame drips red along its blade
As if with blood, thou scarcely shalt be found.
The coward hath a hell unto himself,
Where very fire looks white and licks blue lips,
Crouches and creeps and cowers on the ground;
Threatens the death it dare not deal, and burns
Not, though it blackeneth.

Mark

If that be so,
Isoult, and we meet not in Hell, I'll keep
Thee longer on this earth; here shalt thou sit
In this same tower thou lovest, day by day,
And hold thy vigil o'er the vacant plain
For one banished in far off Brittany.

Isoult

Banished! It is so old a tale. Hast thou
Forgot the time of his first banishment,
When thy knights rose and forced thee bring him back?

Mark

Now hath he fewer friends; Lamorak is dead,
Palomides follows the Questing Beast,
Gareth is gone on distant vow.

Isoult

Yet Arthur,
The first of friends and fearless king, remains.

Mark

Not strange that he should stir in each a cause,
The king who keepeth Launcelot in hall.
Nor it is strange that she, the crownèd Lie,
Should plead for thee.

Isoult

What mean'you, Guinevere?

Mark

'Tis known the Queen and Launcelot live in sin,
Yet has she shame to hide it; thou dost flaunt
Thy guilt. Did'st thou not send to her this word—
"There be four lovers in the world—Launcelot
And Guinevere and Tristram and Isoult?"

Isoult

"There be four lovers in the world—Launcelot
And Guinevere and Tristram and Isoult!"
Aye, true, by Lamorak I sent. How heard'st
Thou that? Thy spies are everywhere—what room
Is left in thee for thine own thoughts, that art
So keen for those of other men? All eye

And ear! Well, let it be thy part to lie,
Watch dog, and look and listen with ears pricked
Outside Love's chamber door.

Mark

Beware, the dog
Feigns sleep, and thou wilt feel his teeth, one day.

Isoult

I care not. I have lost the dread of death;
I walk upon its brink and am not dizzied.
I am so high I stand on mountain tops
And see Death's river in the Vale of Life
Far at my feet in silver quiet shine.
Here on love's height it seems that if I die
I shall not taste the coldness of the stream,
I shall but step into a nearer glory.
Oh, Mark, how shouldst thou know what love like ours
Can be. Man thinks to mate, and in the first
Fair face his wish is met. The maid that lifts
Meek eyes to some strong knight fresh from the lists
And shining in his steel, will see fulfilled
Her convent dream. But not like these we love.
Oh, not like these! On summer evenings thou
Hast seen a meteor fall. We have a belief
'Tis then a soul is born—such souls as mine
And his, brands from the burning caught, and flung
All burning from the hand of God. For us
There was not choice from many loves, but one—
Each unto each, although the world be set
Blazing upon our track!

Mark

Oh rare, rare souls!

Isoult

Aye, rare is he despite thy sneer. And this
Doth most beget thy hate. But wherefore, Mark?
Were there no Tristram wouldst thou be the first?
When lions perish doth the snake come next?

Mark

Snake? Darest thou?

Isoult

'Tis so men speak of thee,
And in the face of his great openness
Thy cunning shows, as snake-slime in the sun.

Mark

Too far, at last thou'rt gone too far, I think!
So safe in thy great beauty dost thou feel—
No man would dare to touch the perfect flesh—
And yet I hate thy beauty—hate, hate, hate
(*He seizes her by the wrists, shaking her as he utters these words full of compressed fury*).
Thy beauty and his strength. I'll tear this curtain
Of flesh God hangs before thy soul to cheat
Men's eyes. I'll strip thee of this insolence.
I hate thy moonlight face, thy midnight hair,
Thy red, red lips that look as if they had
Not yet had time to pale since his last kiss.
(*He forces her slowly back towards the parapet*).

Isoult

I do not fear thee— No, I do not fear.

Thou canst not make me fear. Take thy hands off!

Mark

This flesh thou never givest me to touch
By night nor day, I have it now; I hold
It in my clutch—the wan-white skin. The blood
Sits throned in purple at thy heart and will
Not come and go at bidding as it doth
In meaner veins. White, white, like purity
Proclaimed. Look down—think what a bleeding pulp
Would lie upon those stones! Art thou upon
The verge of death undizzied still?
(*A noise unheeded by Mark is heard in the court-yard below*).
Where is
Thy Tristram now? Cry out and he will hear—
Wilt thou not cry? Not even on God's help?
(*Isoult hangs upon the edge without sound or sign. She smiles into his face*).
Thou wouldst look up out of the flames of Hell
And smile defiance in the face of God.
Methinks I see thee there like a tall lily
Midst of a bed of red—or like a white,
Indomitable star, that in the fierce
And burning glory of the West shows through
Unquenched.
(*Releases her*)
There! I release thee. I will wait—
For God will not endure a pride that shakes
His own Omnipotence. I cannot teach
Thee fear.

Isoult

Not though thou lessonest in what

Thou hast been mastered well. Was it thy thought
Thou couldst beget in me a whimpering fear,
A puling, crying fear—the child of thee —
White-livered, watery-veined? Thy hands have touched
My throat and left disgust, or I could laugh.

Brangwane (*rushing in*).

Madam Isoult, dear lady—he is come.

Isoult

Tristram? Hath Tristram come?

Brangwane.

This moment.

Mark

Ha!
Yet had he been too late.

Isoult

Go bring him here.
(*Mark goes out*).
Still am I standing, though I swayed but now
Within the circle of enarming death
Like poppies in the crescent of the scythe.
Oh, but I know that soon, soon must he mow
Us down. It cannot last long. We have lived.
Let it come when it will. I feel the event
Now set in motion moving toward me slow.
I wait for it, and cannot be surprised.

Part II

Scene II. (*The great hall in the palace of Tintagil. A banqueting table in the midst—at one side a raised dais with two throne chairs under canopy. On the right at foot of throne is another chair, garlanded with green. Garlands of flowers are twined in the railing of the gallery which overhangs the hall. The lintel posts, wreathed with roses, are crowned with lighted torches, and clustered torches are at intervals around the hall. Mullioned windows at back of hall and of gallery. A harper sings in the gallery*).

His falcon stoops above the wood,
His grayhound courseth as it should,
His hounds make music bold and clear,
A-chasing fleet the flying deer
His horn it hath a clarion call,
His harp sings soft in bower and hall.
Who is he—canst thou guess?
Tristram of Lyonesse,
Tristram of Lyonesse.

His clean sword doth not gather rust,
His lance it biteth to the dust,
E'er ready is his restless blade,
To draw for king and country's aid,
And ne'er shall king or country fall,
While still he fighteth for Cornwall.
Who doth our wrong redress?
Tristram of Lyonesse,
Tristram of Lyonesse.

(*Blanchelys, Linette, Colombe, Ettarde, and others busied in binding the lintel posts*).

Blanchelys

Do you recall, Linette, the banquets once
We had at Joyous Garde—where was less state,
But we were far more blithe of heart. Here near
The roof a grayness gathers o'er our heads;
The banner of the empire of the dark.
And see these tapers dim and sputtering,
Almost you'd think the little ghosts of moths
They had consumed came back and that way took
A faint revenge.

Sir Andred

Of what doth Blanchelys talk, Linette?

Linette

Of moths we cannot see, that dull The tapers.

Sir Andred

Ghosts of butterflies? Light talk Indeed!

Blanchelys

I say there always seems a gloom Upon this place.

Sir Andred

The shade of the gray Mark.
He hangs like fog to thicken every breath,
A dank rot to our lungs. Faugh, what a court!

Colombe

I've watched and have made sure he hates the
Queen;
But if he hate her, why must she stay here?
You'd think he'd wish her from his sight, and give
Us leave to go.

Sir Andred

She is the wound that itches—
Itches! He cannot keep his fingers off.
I wonder not, when I look on the Queen,—
To have that woman ever near, yet scorned
From touching her. 'Twould madden me—I could
Not let her live.

Colombe

Thou wouldst not let her live!
The let of that proud life could no more lie
With thee than now it doth with Mark. For shame!
To speak thus of the Queen!

Blanchelys

Her scorn is noble.
Her nature lieth open to the sun,
Extreme in hate and love, in hot and cold,
Like the unscreenèd desert of white noon
And icy night.

Sir Andred

Aye, thou art right enough.
Hot noon with Tristram maketh a cold night
For Mark.

Linette

I hear voices and laughter—Haste
Make haste, Ettarde, I think they're coming now,
Are your wreathes ready? Catch this garland's end.

Blanchelys (*tossing garland*)

And this.

Colombe

And this—

Ettarde

She will be beautiful
Tonight, and proud.

Linette

And wear the carcanet
Of rubies that Sir Tristram gave—

Colombe

They're here!

(*Enter King Mark and Isoult, Tristram walking alone behind them followed by a train of knights and ladies. Mark sits on dais, Isoult behind him, Tristram in chair at right*).

Mark

Tristram, wilt thou not let them fetch the harp
For thee to sing. The ladies would elect
A love-song, and the knights a battle-lay,

Perchance, or the bold music of the hunt,
But choose thou what thou wilt.

Tristram

Nay, if I sing
It shall be none of these. There is a song
Yet warming in my breast and newly made—
A song of the rough sea. Will you hear that?
A theme not strange to any here in old
Tintagil, where beneath these castle walls
The sea doth build himself a dwelling-place
To mock our majesty. We hear the wild
White workmen of the waves, the wind doth lash,
Hammer the roofs and sculpture columns vast
For him whose state is many-halled—who hath
A thousand palaces where he may spread
His purple on the floor and dream away
His summer rest. Not he—he is a king
That never taketh ease. My childhood nights
With the great voice like an unresting God's
Were filled—that slumbered not nor slept. If still
I move from task to task, it is the voice
I think, urging me on. Some sleepless salt
That stings the sluggish tides within my veins.
This is the song.

(*He sings*).

As some sea-mew that 's blown
By the wild gust alone
From the salt strand
Far inward o'er the land
Goes crying in its pain
Lamenting the waste main;
So calls my heart in me
Still yearning for the sea.

Give me the sea again,
Give me the sea!

Or some white fleck of foam
Torn from its ocean home,
As the wave flies,
Falls shoreward then and dies,
Waif of the storm's free reign
Fretting the lawless plain;
So dies my life in me
Set burning for the sea.
Give me the sea again,
Give me the sea!

Isoult

Give me the sea! Thou canst not ask it more
Than I. For it was round my childhood close
As round thine own. My land is the sea's lover
Not fronting him with a bleak rock-bound coast
But low and green and woman-like she lieth
Encompassed and encircled by the main.
In her its changeful emerald has been fixed,
And made green constancy.

Mark

Dost thou not keep
The sea in sight, likewise, in Brittany,
Tristram?

Tristram

We do, my Liege.

Mark

'Tis fortunate.
And the word Brittany doth bring to mind
One thing tonight is wanting to our joy;
The hero of the feast must sit alone,
His triumph all unshared by her who waits
In Brittany—Isoult of the White Hands.

Tristram

Uncle, I wedded at her father's wish
Isoult of Brittany. 'Twas known to him
That on the morrow I must ride away.
I scarce do know my wife—that love of ours
Was as a gleam of winter sun—hath made
No change in the white silence of her life;
The frosty seal that locks the crystal source
Of her young soul, is still unthawed; no wreath
Nor garland of her virgin snow, hath yet
As by a breath been stirred.

Mark

Doth she not fret?

Tristram

She lives in quiet. Mine were a rude life
To share.

Mark

'Tis true, 'tis true—the fault is ours,
To lay our burdens on thy back and leave
No time of ease. Henceforward shalt thou rest.
And since we know thou tak'st no thought for self

Nor sparest toil, but would be ever gone
On some hard quest, we must, under the guise
Of an ingratitude, hide our right wish;
Command thy absence, banish to Bretagne
And exile thee to love; punish with peace.
Those two white hands will cool with their soft snow
The newer wounds—and children come to bless.
So now,—be witness, Friends,—Tristram from Cornwall
Is banished for the term of ten round years.
And none shall harbour him, and none entreat
His stay beneath their roof, save they themselves
Incur like penalty. But as we part
In love, help me to show it this last night,
This night of parting fill with revel, wine,
(*rises*)
And song. Come, let us start the cup. I give
Ye for a pledge, Tristram of Lyonesse
And his Isoult—Isoult of the White Hands!

Sir Andred

Tristram of Lyonesse and his Isoult!

(*He lifts his goblet to the Queen. The knights and ladies who have been looking on each other with glances of surprise and consternation, all follow his example and cry "Tristram of Lyonesse and his Isoult," leaving off the words "of the White Hands," and many cups are lifted toward the Queen*).

Tristram (*rises*)

And is there none to help me thank the king?
His guerdon for his battles I have won,

To banish me the soil for which I fought!
Now I have served his need he shakes me off.
I go to Brittany—but not for peace.
Look on this sword—this hacked, hewn warrior
That bought the freedom from the Irish tax;
That hath saved Cornwall from her enemies;
Hath slain them singly one by one; or piled
The field with mounded heaps. Now, in its prime
Are age and rust to come on it? Is it
In dark oblivion, in its narrow bed
To turn and sleep? No, it hath dreamed too long
Of glory—to the world made real that dream.
Tristram, thou, crafty Mark, canst banish—never
Tristram's good sword. For that can carve its way,
Can split the fine hair of the law's decrees;
Can rip thy realm in long red, running furrows
And sow them with the white seed of the slain.
I bear the load of Cornwall on my back
I shake my shoulders, and thy sceptre sways.
Thus, did I choose to pluck down what I built!
But no, with my obedience I cement
The structure I have raised. Sustain my work
And set the seal of patience on the end
Which has had force and violence for means.
I then, obey,—I go to Brittany.
It is not far, and soon I may return.
But be you wise and give no cause for that!

Part II

Scene III. (*The same hall later. The garlands are withered, the wine cups on table overturned. The only light the moonlight which streams through large windows at back. Tristram and Isoult stand together at the casement and Tristram opens a lattice on the rose garden without. Beyond moonlight shining on the sea*).

Tristram

Look out, my Love, all night the sleepless sea
Aching with anguish for the moon, hath tossed.
All night desire hath burned in a white flame
Her image in his breast. All night the wake
Of her illusive promise on the wave
Lay unredeemed. But yonder, now, at last
The slow Queen cometh, stooping to his arms
As thou to mine.

Isoult

The torches all are quenched;
Faded to smoke and gone. The garlands, too,
Are drooped. Scents of dead roses haunt the air
With perfume grown more poignant than a pain.
Joy as it withers pierces all the sense
With unrecoverable sweet. To-night
I am but the stripped stalk that stands above
The ruin of the rose.

Tristram

Silence—not now!
To-morrow must we speak of banishment

And parting; not to-night—to-night we'll keep
Perfect.

Isoult

Canst thou hold sorrow at arm's length?
I cannot, Tristram. Oh, I fear, I fear!

Tristram

What dost thou fear?

Isoult

That being far away,
Thou wilt forget.

Tristram

Forget! I go from thee
Into the void of absence, like a star
Thrust from his sphere, that spills his heart in fire
Along the way.

Isoult

I stay, a rooted star,
That burns fixed in one place. It is not all
My fear.

Tristram

What other, then?

Isoult

That meek Isoult
To whom thou goest—

Tristram

Is that doubt not laid?
Knowledge of thee, my Queen, does put her off
As the long, flaming sunset of the North
Doth hold against the moon the evening sky.

Isoult

My very name she seemeth to usurp.

Tristram

Nay, is thy echo.

Isoult

Echo mocks me then.

Tristram

Thou knowest the story well. She tending me
While I lay ailing of my wound, I called
"Isoult," and yet again, "Isoult," as men
Delight to get the well-belovèd name
Even from the empty air. Until at last
By much most vain imagining, she came
To seem some part of thee. When thou hadst sunk
Below the blank horizon of my life,
Lost to mine eyes; she cheated them, as some
Mirage—a thing of light and painted mist,
That imaged thee.

Isoult

But she—doth she love thee?

Tristram

'Tis possible. So few men hath she seen—
It were not strange. At times I think—and yet
I cannot tell. Her soul hath built its nest
Like some wild sea-bird in the unclimbed cleft;
And there the white thing broods. But for the world—
The naked rock and lone depth of green wave,
Depth as the depth of those sea-water eyes.

Isoult

I had not heard before of these strange eyes.
Her hands—now—Tell me, are her hands indeed
So beautiful?

Tristram

Her snowdrop hands! Isoult
Of the White Hands, that always idly droop,
Or that hang folded just below her breast.
Or often have I seen them lie palm laid
To palm, halves of a shell that hold a pearl,
The pale, pure pearl of Peace. And when her hands
Unclasp, open and flutter—then the doves
Of Peace are in the air. One fettered, bound
To me, while mine are free to swing the sword,
To thrust the lance, to close and crush thine own:—
Thy hands that are so strong, so lithe and live.
Thy hands—those half-blown buds upon the stalk
Which thy face crowneth as the perfect flower—

Hers are but marble feebly come to life.
I have gone to her, when at touch of those
Cold finger-tips my blood was chilled, and sullen
Returned unto its seat. Her hands are fair,
Yet were they made for telling beads; to hold
Tapers as waxen as themselves. Thine count
Love's rosary and in these taper ends
Love's red flame burns. What tell they of the Grail?
An angel tall the veilèd chalice bears,
A crimson splendor, mystic rose of light,
Intolerable, which men may not behold:
Be thou my angel of the Grail—lift thou
My cup of life on high—let it shine thro'
Thy hands, thy blessèd hands, with love's intensè
Own consecrated light—none holier—
While I kneel on before thee—Thus!
(*In the exaltation of passion he catches her hands up into the attitude of the Angel of the Grail*).

Isoult

Tristram!
Oh, say no more, 'tis too near blasphemy!

Tristram

Give me thy hands, both, both to hold! Ah, hands
Thrilling and pregnant with the pulse of blood
My kiss makes quick:—the talking blood that speaks
From the mere finger-tips when lips are mute.

Isoult

Read you their message now? Not hers, Isoult
Of Brittany's, nor marble's self, more cold.
That word that lies like death upon my heart—

Is in them—that farewell. If they speak now
It is of one last pressure—then apart,
Apart and empty, evermore! Oh, God,
Why hast thou made so vain the love Thou didst
Foredoom? This was no chance—it was to be.
Some wind of Destiny, ere we were born,
Filled up the spirit's sail. Across the waste,
Untraversed sea of life, on which no paths
Are charted down, we near and nearer drew
Unto each other. Why heed you this decree?
He cannot fasten his weak will on us.
We are above his bidding—Let us go!

Tristram

Where shall we go?

Isoult

Bear me to Joyous Garde
Or some strong castle of thy holding, South.
Once there—

Tristram

And undo all I came to do?
My banishment was public,—did I fail
In this obedience, what subject would
Remain to Cornwall's law?

Isoult

Care you for that?

Tristram

Thou art the queenly head, Isoult, that crowns

The prow—and I the steerer of the ship;
Thou must *look* majesty, I keep afloat
The rotten realm;—else would it sink.

Isoult

Then let
It sink.

Tristram

So heedless, love?

Isoult

Of all but thee!
Thou art my law—my realm is in thy heart.

Tristram

Oh, silence, for thou temptest me to dream
Once more that younger dream which cannot be.
Not twice a man surprises unarmed Fate.
Not twice youth overrideth all the sage,
Calm wisdom of the world, and, sets its pulse
Abeating to his own hot blood's wild tune.
And if we came again to Joyous Garde
Can we be sure to find it still the spring?
Would not the ghosts of those dead, happy hours,
Make rustling Autumn round re-entering feet,
Though they were golden yet?

Isoult

The doubt reminds
Me of thy song. How go the words—Is't thus?
(*She hums*).

Life runneth forward, though too oft its face
It turneth back,
For it hath set its feet unto the race
Along Time's track.

No joy returneth that hath once been born,
Into Hope's womb;
No day shall live to see a second dawn,
Springing from gloom .

No May reneweth twice the self-same year
Its leafy screen,
Though Autumn dreameth, 'midst her gold and sere,
Of its young green.

The ancient paths are closed to thee and me,
Through joy and pain,
And nevermore what hath been shall it be,
For us again.

Then let us kiss this moment, lip and brow
(So brief is bliss),
Too soon the Never cometh, this is *Now,*
Then let us kiss.

Tristram

Then let us kiss!
The night grows late. Come to thy chamber, love
Of old hath consecrated to itself.

Isoult

Ah, not to-night!

Tristram

To-morrow must I go.

Isoult

I would thou wert already gone.

Tristram

Wherefore?

Isoult

Oh, I who never fear, am now afraid!
Lay thy hand here. All beatings of this heart
Are known to thee—wild captive in the keep
That knocks its message through the prison wall—
All, from its leap to meet thee, to the swift
Sustainèd pulse of passion and high hope.
In anger hast thou heard it beat as strong
As if it rained its blows upon the foe;
But never with this dull and failing stroke.
What is there in the world to work this change?
To work Queen Isoult's fear? All dangers that
Can come have I looked on. But this—it seems
To have no feature and no form—and yet
It hath presence that I feel—I feel!

Tristram

What dost thou dread? It were a strange new fear
The fear of Mark (he laughs). Leave that to him
whose life
Is one long cowardice, and we will laugh
At him—at fear—at fate—at Death.

Mark

(*As from the shadows behind he passes his sword through Tristram's back*).

Laugh now!
No laughter? Then I laugh for thee. Ha, ha!
(*Echoes in the roof repeat ha, ha, ha ha!*)
(*Brangwane rushes wildly down from gallery above, in which she has kept watch for the lovers*).

Brangwane

I heard a laugh—than devils laughed all round
Me in the air. Oh Mark! This is thy work!

PART III

Scene I. (*A chamber in King Howell's castle in Brittany. On a couch covered with a bearskin, the wounded Tristram, weak and spent, is lying. A fire burning in the huge chimney, Isoult La Blanche Mains in a corner where the gathering twilight is deepest, seated at the harp. She sings*).

Tristram

Isoult! Isoult!

Isoult Blanche Mains

Is it for me he calls?

Tristram

Isoult! Isoult! Not Mark's Isoult, but mine!

Isoult Blanche Mains

(*Starting up in joy*).
"Not Mark's Isoult—but mine!" Oh, is it true,
At last? He said—"Not Mark's Isoult, but mine."
So often have I heard him call on her
I had almost resigned my name—but now,
'Tis I am wanted, I!

Tristram

(*Aloud—his mind, in his weakness, wandering dreamily*).
Not ever Mark's,
But mine, mine always, from the first!

Isoult Blanche Mains

(*Covers her face with her hands*)
Alas,
I might have known!

Tristram

(*With difficulty raising himself on his elbow to look out upon the sea. The sunset light falls on his face*).
How endless is this day!
Not yet hath it all vanished—that long strand
Of yonder gold along the lone sea marge
As if Night, grieving, held within his hand
One golden tress of the lost Day. But look,
A single sail! See, see, how fast it comes!
(*Isoult Blanche Mains rises in sudden agitation*).

Isoult Blanche Mains

A sail! It is too soon—it cannot be.
(*She stands behind the couch watching the sea*).

Tristram

The cupped sail holds the last red light, as wine
Is held in the the hand's hollow. All the rest
The many, many sails, which lying here
I have seen pass, fixed, silent, sad and slow
As destiny, held to their course. But this
So live, determined, swift— What quick import
Strengthens the pinions of its wingèd rush!

Isoult Blanche Mains

It heads for here and comes straight toward us—
Straight!

Tristram

What were her words? Some wind ere we were born
Filled up the spirit's sail? Ah, I forget
When, where she said it—Strange, I once could count
Each crimson hour that hath for us unfolded,
But now the rose of memory shattereth
And sheds its scattered petals on my heart.
(*The last light dies out*).
Doth the room darken all at once? Who's there?
(*Isoult Blanche Mains comes toward him out of the shadows—he starts wildly, then recovering himself*).
Ah, it is thou, my patient, poor Isoult,

Some stirring shadow, fold of drapery,
Mocked me.

Isoult Blanche Mains

The casement—wilt thou have it closed?

Tristram

Nay, let it stay, I fain would see the stars
And feel the fitful, faint, salt-breathing airs.
My spirit is so still I know that Death
Hath come. I am too weak for pain or love.
The wind of Destiny drops to a calm.
What are we but a column of towering dust
Raised by a breath of passion in the waste,
And when the wind hath passed we fall to dust
Again . . . Think you, Isoult, I might be helped
Into the air, forth on the battlements?

Isoult Blanche Mains

I'll call thy men and they shall carry thee.
(*She calls without*)
Brian—Boris—Uwaine—Meliot!

(*Enter four retainers. They support Tristram from the room. He leans heavily on them. Isoult Blanche Mains goes to the window and looks out*).

It hath grown dark, I can no longer see.
The moon will be to-night—she steps from out
The middle sea and stands a moment-long
Still on the threshold of the world: the world
That empty seems of any save of her.
The air is full of her, as one we love
When he is near will fill the room, until

We scarce draw breath for his mere presence. So
The moon fills all; and then she walks the path
Straight o'er the sea, and all the little waves
Jump up to kiss her silver feet.
(*She takes up the harp that leans against the casement sweeping it with her fingers*).
Last night
I heard the sea-wind sighing in the strings
As if a sorrow audible did haunt,
For hands that ne'er shall touch its soul again.
My harp, those songs of his live in thee still.
(*She sings*)

Sea-Swallow that didst bear her on thy wings
To old Tintagil, hold of Cornish kings,
Sea-Swallow bring her thence again to me,
We will take refuge now, we driven three,
We will take refuge with the friendly sea,
Sea-Swallow.

Sea-Swallow, bear us from the king-owned earth
To those wild realms unruled that gave us birth,
To the waste regions of the restless brine,
Whose life and freedom will I claim for mine,
Whose life and freedom shalt thou claim for thine,
Sea-Swallow.

Sea-Swallow her sole throne shall be thy prow,
The blowing spray shall crown Queen Isoult's brow,
The warming East shall find her morning's guest,
The sunset leave us loitering to the West,
The sunset leave thee to thy starry quest,
Sea-Swallow.

Sea-Swallow, hasten ere it be too late,
The Queen is wearied of her empty state,

Come let us lay our lives in the winds' hand
For mine is wasting in the woeful land,
And thine is wasting on the idle strand,
Sea-Swallow.

(*As the last chords die out Isoult Blanche Mains looks up and sees La Belle Isoult standing on the threshold. For a moment, in silence the two steadfastly regard each other*).

Queen Isoult

I heard the harp—I thought that it was he—
Where is he?

Isoult Blanche Mains

On the battlements, without—
Yet stay an instant. It was I who sent
For thee.

Queen Isoult

How good—how generous—thou art!
Complete thy goodness—lead me to him—quick!

Isoult Blanche Mains

I ask one grace—that thou wilt stand there still,
And let me look at thee. For I must see
What power is in thee to eat men's hearts
And leave the husks. Thou'rt very beautiful,
Yet other women have some beauty, too—
But none those eyes that say—"Within me is
Some dread, sweet mystery. Wilt thou not seek
And find it out?" And at the summons, men
Plunge in and tread thy spirit's labyrinth
With tenuous clue—nor ever reach the heart

Of it—of thee—save one—Tristram. What found
He there? For he has never since come back.
Something there is unseized, unseizable
Men die to win. My husband didst thou take,
And my young brother died for love of thee,
When with my lord he went unto thy court
And came too near the passion of you twain;—
Died of that nearness, scorched by the great fire
That could not give him warmth. That tender slip
Of youth transplanted, withered at thy sun,
And yet, and yet, in spite of all my wrong,
Facing thee thus, as I stand here, I do
Not hate.

Queen Isoult

Thou canst not hate the wretched, dear
Isoult. Oh, pity me. instead!

Isoult Blanche Mains

And I
Do pity thee. For thou hast suffered much.
(*Sounds of steps without*).

Isoult

Ah God, beyond thy power to know how much!
And may it ever be beyond thy power.
No knowledge of such suffering for thee!

Isoult Blanche Mains

Oh but I know, I know!

Isoult

But not the pain,
Which naught can ease unless to take thy heart

Out of thy breast, and hold it in thy hand,
And dig thy nails down into it for hate!

Isoult Blanche Mains

Aye, that. Or not to dig my nails, but leave
My bosom empty to a little rest.

Isoult

Poor child! Have I done this? But no—ah no!
Mine was he long before. You came between,
And crossed our Fate and drew it after you.
What noise is that?

Isoult Blanche Mains

'Tis he. They bring him here
Let him not see thee suddenly.
(*La Belle Isoult withdraws into the shadow. Enter Tristram supported as before. He seems more exhausted, and his eyes are partly closed. Hs is placed on a couch. Isoult Blanche Mains bends over him*).
Art faint?
Doth the wound pain? What wilt thou have?

(*Tristram opens his eyes, they rest upon the Queen. He raises himself on one arm, gazing fixedly at her*).

Tristram

So Death himself is pitiful—and shapes
Out of his very shadows, thee—unto
My failing eyes.
Thou art her spirit come,
Drawn by my longing. Thou wilt go with me

A little of the road; until we reach
The shadow-country's border vast and dim,
Where ghosts of lovers thicken all the air
As ashes of dead fires fanned by the wind.
Thou must turn back too soon—ere thou art missed
In old Tintagil's hall. What boots the torch
And swinging cresset if thy gaze be dark,
Dark and deserted of the wandering soul?
I know they hold a revel there to-night,
I seem to hear the music—see the lights—

Queen Isoult

(*Rushing to him*).

Tristram! Tristram!

(*Isoult Blanche Mains goes out*).

Tristram

Art thou the waking Truth?
I have had dreams that had these hands, this hair.

Queen Isoult

I came as fast as sails could draw. Isoult
It was who sent for me. Oh, evermore,
Will those white hands two serving angels seem,
That wait on her pure thoughts!

Tristram

Isoult! She hath
Not stayed for thanks.

Queen Isoult

Ah, she hath slipped away.

Tristram

Isoult the meek! How doth she think of thee?
As the still-hearted pool, that the wild sea
Invades at last.

Queen Isoult

Am I the sea?

Tristram

The sea!
The flood that lifts my soul against the stars—
Yet now—yet now—I sink—I am dashed down—
Dazed, dizzy, drowned and dark! I cannot see—
All swims—Ah, what is this—

Queen Isoult

Tristram! Not now—
Thou wilt not leave me—I am come—we are
Together—Oh, not now!

Tristram

Lo, it is death!
(*He sinks back. Isoult throws herself with a cry upon his breast. After a long while she rises and stands before the body*).

Queen Isoult

Tristram, dost thou recall the cup—that cup,
Of a strange magic by my mother mixed
That should have bound my love to Mark,—I chanced

To find? Ah, I remember that we stood
Seeing the flacket curiously wrought,
And turned it round and all unconsciously
We gazed into its black-red depths; nor dreamed
Love's was the flame there, Death's the drowsy dark.
It was the sunset hour, the sea was wine
And brimmed bright purple to its fine, far edge
Of gold. And at the chalice rim had Night
The dusk-browed set her lips, and Day's bright head
Drooped langorous for one last parting draught.
Thus touched and pledged at brim the lips of Day
And Night—sea-chalice for their loving cup.
And we drank also.
(*She takes a small covered flacket from her breast*).
Oh, as a cordial, Death
I drink thee that art but the wine of love
Distilled too deep—the ruby grown too red,
The rapture made too strong. How should it end
But thus with the wild hearts that strain themselves
To silence— Thus! We who have known all life
What is there after love left us to prove
But death? We who have felt a thirst that life
Left quenchless—fill us, Death, with thy sage draught,
Mingling immortal coolness in our veins.
Look Tristram, look! In my two hands I hold
The Grail—as once thou saidst. The purple blood
Our passion in its agony hath bled,
The vision that moved through our lives in light
In music and in splendor— Lo, again
I fling my soul with thine into the bowl
I drink the marriage of dissolveless Fates
In death—as life—(She drinks)

The cup is empty, God.
(*Falls on Tristram's body*)
(*Sounds of tumult are suddenly heard without. Enter in desperate haste Isoult de La Blanche Mains—she strains frantically at the great doors, striving to close them*).

Isoult Blanche Mains

Help, help, Isoult! Help me to shut the doors!
Quick, ere they come! They are close, close behind—
Mark and his men. Help me for Tristram's sake!
(*She struggles with the doors*).
Isoult, Isoult, dost thou not hear? Come quick!
(*She turns, sees the bodies of Tristram and Isoult, comes slowly down, and stands looking on them in silence. Mark appears in the doorway, his men crowding behind him*).

Mark

Is the sick lion cowered in his den?
And our fair Queen, the true, the chaste? Ha, ha!

Isoult Blanche Mains

(*Pointing to the dead*).

Here are they. See, we had no power on them
Nor thou nor I. Love such as theirs, I think
That God himself will scarcely dare to touch.